

## How can getting hepatitis C be prevented?

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C, but you can take steps to protect yourself:

- ♦ Avoid any direct contact with blood.
- ♦ Never share drug injection equipment.
- ♦ Always use a latex condom when you have sex.
- ♦ If you get a tattoo or body piercing, be sure that it is at a licensed business that uses sterile inks and needles.

## What should I do if I have hepatitis C?

You should talk to your health care provider about ways to protect your health. Don't drink alcohol. Check with a health care provider before taking any medications (prescription or non-prescription). Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B if you are at risk for these diseases.

Learn how to avoid spreading the virus to others. For example, don't share razors, toothbrushes or any other items that might contain blood. Your health care provider can tell you about other basic things you can do to keep from spreading hepatitis C.

## For more information about hepatitis C:

- ♦ Ask a health care provider or local health clinic;
- ♦ Call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's hepatitis C hotline at **1-888-443-HepC (4372)**;
- ♦ Visit the Massachusetts Department of Public Health website at **[www.masshepc.org](http://www.masshepc.org)** (information about hepatitis A, B and C and other available resources); or
- ♦ Contact your local health department;
- ♦ Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at **[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)**.



**Massachusetts  
Department of Public Health**

**[www.state.ma.us/dph](http://www.state.ma.us/dph)**

**[www.masshepc.org](http://www.masshepc.org)**

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Learn more.



Be sure.

HEPATITIS C?

# Learn more.

## What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a virus that causes liver disease. Hepatitis C is a completely different disease from hepatitis A and B.

An estimated 100,000 people in Massachusetts have hepatitis C. Most of them don't know it—so they're not taking some important steps to protect their health.

## How is hepatitis C spread?

People who have hepatitis C carry the virus in their blood. Hepatitis C spreads when infected blood enters an opening in the skin. This can happen if you share needles to inject drugs, for example.

Hepatitis C can be spread through sexual contact, although this appears to be rare. A pregnant woman can also give the virus to her unborn child.

Hepatitis C is **not** spread by casual contact like hugging, sneezing, coughing or sharing food and drinks.

## Who is at highest risk for hepatitis C?

You are at risk if you:

- ♦ Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992;
- ♦ Injected drugs, *even once*;
- ♦ Have had sex with many partners, especially if you didn't use condoms; or
- ♦ Have been on kidney dialysis.

## How serious is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is very serious for some people, but not for others. Most people who have hepatitis C will carry the virus for the rest of their lives. At its worst, hepatitis C can cause liver failure and even death. It's not possible to know which people will develop serious problems.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

Many people with hepatitis C have no symptoms. But even if you feel fine, the virus could be hurting your liver. And you could be spreading the disease to others.

Some people have flu-like symptoms such as extreme tiredness, nausea, and loss of appetite. However, it is often hard to know that these types of common complaints are due to hepatitis C. Some people with the virus may also have jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin).

## How do I know if I have hepatitis C?

You need a simple blood test to know for sure. Talk to your health care provider about getting tested if you think you are at risk for hepatitis C.

## Is there a treatment for hepatitis C?

Yes. A drug called interferon can be used to treat hepatitis C. It is usually used in combination with other drugs. Your health care provider can tell you more about treatment options and things you can do to keep your liver healthy.

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